

The Development of Physical Development

0 – 6 yrs

This section focuses on the development of one aspect of physical development – Gross motor skills, considering development across the Birth to six age range. The children attend a variety of early years settings and are supported in their learning by a range of practitioners.

Meet the Children

Thomas – 13 months

Thomas has attended a Day Nursery, close to mum's workplace for 3 days a week since he was three months old. On the other two days he is at home with mum and sister Sophie. Sophie also attends the nursery and is currently in the pre-school room. Thomas's key person, Teresa, supports him in the baby room.



Bradley – 4 years

Bradley attends a Foundation Stage unit in a Children's Centre. He currently attends five morning sessions a week. Teachers, nursery nurses and teaching assistants staff the unit. His key person, Marie, supports Bradley in group sessions.



Keeley – 2 years

Keeley is cared for on a full time basis by her childminder Sarah. Her older brother, Jake, is at school. Keeley and Sarah collect him at the end of the day. During the week they attend two sessions of the local Stay and Play at the Children's Centre and also use the local environment.



Saba – 5 years

Saba attends a large reception unit within a primary school in an urban area. Three teachers and three teaching assistants staff the unit. Saba is bilingual. Before starting school she attended a local playgroup for three sessions a week.



Sophie – 3 years

Sophie has been attending the morning sessions at the local pre-school in the church hall for the past two months. Twenty-three children attend pre school with Sophie. Her key person, Sue, supports eight children. In the afternoon she stays at home with mum or granddad. Sophie has a new baby brother called Tom.



Miles – 6 years

Miles attends a rural village school where he is in a mixed reception and Yr 1 class. One full time teacher and one full time teaching assistant staff the class. Before starting school, Miles attended the pre-school situated on the school site.



The physical development of a child from birth to six years is a time of striking change; Newborns arrive with reflex actions but are barely able to complete independent physical actions. Contrast this with an active six year old, who will have physical skills of balance, control, manipulation and co-ordination. Physical activity is essential for normal growth, building muscle strength, lung capacity and bone density. Regular physical activity combined with a healthy diet is an essential contributor to children's overall health and well-being.

Physical development is important because movement is the main way in which young children explore and learn. As the non-mobile baby develops greater movement skills there is greater potential for a range of experiences, which they can access and learn from.

Young children need space in which to practise their growing skills and abilities. Jennie Lindon points out that '*a sense of physical competence, or incompetence, affects child's sense of self-esteem*' (Understanding Child Development). By planning an environment where children are free to explore and be active, adults are contributing to the elevation of children's confidence and self-esteem. If children are able to practise a skill in a non-threatening way with lots of appropriate adult intervention and praise, they will experience continuing success, which will then inspire them to want to keep learning and improving.

However, it is important to recognise that there should be a balance between letting the child have a go and offering help if it is obvious the child is experiencing difficulty.

Physical development should not be seen as separate from other areas of learning and development. It is interlinked with all aspects of development because children learn through being both active and interactive, using all of the senses and making associations between new experiences and what they already understand.



**Context for learning:
Learning to walk
Thomas: 13 months**

What did Thomas do?

During the past four weeks Teresa has observed Thomas's development as he is becoming more mobile within the setting.

He has progressed from pulling himself up on furniture to cruising along the settee and is now able to use the furniture for support in moving across spaces.

To encourage him further, Teresa and other members of staff have been walking with him, holding on to both of his hands, and he is now quite confident in this.

Teresa then introduced Thomas to the heavy-based walker in the outdoor area where Thomas would have more space to explore.

Thomas was very excited by this new toy and began exploring the bricks in the base. After a time Teresa noticed that he was trying to pull himself up on the handle and supported his efforts. She gently moved the walker forward to start him walking and then, when he began moving, she encouraged him enthusiastically.

Thomas spent a long time outside today practising this new skill, while Teresa ensured that he was able to move freely in an uncluttered space.

Links to Early Years Foundation Stage

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Self-confidence and Self-esteem.

- Feel safe and secure within healthy relationships with key people.

Physical Development

Movement and Space

- Makes strong and purposeful movements, often moving from the position in which they are placed.
- Use their increasing mobility to connect with toys, objects and people.

How did the adult support Thomas's learning?

- By providing the resources required for his success.
- By working together with colleagues to support his learning.
- By providing Thomas with quality time and space to learn.

Next steps

- Support his independent walking by encouraging him to take steps between two people.
- Provide a range of opportunities for Thomas to practise his new skills within the nursery.



**Context for learning:
Exploring the 'Nursery
Gym' at the Stay and Play
Keeley: 2 years**

What did Keeley do?

Sarah encouraged Keeley to use the new Nursery Gym on a recent visit to the Stay and Play session at the local Children's Centre. The Nursery Gym is specially designed to allow children to explore using a link system of steps, tunnel, ramp and slide.

Keeley followed her friend Zareena and they began climbing the three steps, holding onto the handrail. She climbed the steps by putting both feet on each step, and then crawled hesitantly towards the tunnel.

She glanced around towards Sarah, looking for support. Sarah moved to the end of the tunnel to encourage Keeley, who then laughed excitedly and crawled quickly through. At the top of the slide Keeley experienced difficulty positioning herself for sliding down. Sarah talked her gently through the process and then encouraged her to repeat the game until she was able to complete it without support.

Sarah allowed Keeley to continue to explore this new experience for some time. She observed that Keeley was becoming increasingly confident in the control of her body.

Links to Early Years Foundation Stage

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Emotional Development: Self-confidence and self-esteem.

- Explore from the security of a close relationship with a caring and responsive adult

Physical Development

Movement and Space

- Gradually gain control of their whole bodies and are becoming aware of how to negotiate the space and objects around them

Health and Bodily Awareness

- Practise and develop what they can do.

How did the adult support Keeley's learning?

- By providing a reassuring presence
- By supporting new learning
- By giving praise and encouragement.

Next steps

- Provide other opportunities for climbing and sliding
- Encourage Keeley to explore the equipment in different ways e.g. moving up the ramp and down the steps.

Context for learning:
Dance session
following the story
'Where the Wild
Things Are'



What did Sophie do?

The staff at Sophie's pre-school noticed how much the children all enjoyed the story 'Where the Wild Things Are.' Sue, remembering that several of her key children enjoy moving imaginatively, suggests extending the experience. She plans an adult focused activity using the story and puppets as the stimulus. She retells the story and encourages the children to respond, through movement, in their own way. "Shall we all go to the island with Max?" Let's get in the boat!" Sue sits with Sophie and they "row! row! row! the boat." all the way to the island. Sue continues to provide a narrative and supports the children by suggesting movement ideas. *Now it's time for the party! Let's dance!* said Sue. Sophie and her friends stamp their feet, wave their arms and twirl round and round until dizzy. Sue laughs with the children and reminds them to make sure they have enough space around them and models different ways of moving. To draw the session to a close Sue calms the children by reminding them that at the end of the story Max is ready for bed.

How did the adult support Sophie's learning?

- By planning experiences around children's interests in the story
- By modelling a range of ideas for intended movement
- By supporting the children's development of spatial awareness.

Links to Early Years Foundation Stage

Physical Development **Movement and Space**

- Respond to rhythm, movement and story by means of gesture and movement

Creative Development **Developing Imagination and** **Imaginative play**

- Begin to make believe by pretending

Communication, Language and **Literacy** **Reading**

- Have some favourite stories, rhymes, songs, poems or jingles

Next steps

- Introduce music to support movement experiences
- Explore the concepts of fast, slow and stop
- Plan activities around moving in and out of space safely.

**Context for learning:
Exploration of the new
fixed outdoor physical
equipment**



What did Bradley do?

Some new fixed outdoor play equipment has recently been installed in the outdoor area.

The practitioner has planned for children to access the area frequently whilst she observes and supports, both to ensure children's safety with a new resource and to assess their confidence and co-ordination. She models walking on the equipment, jumping safely from low levels and the need to watch out for others in the same space. Bradley is keen to explore. He walks along a narrow log holding onto the safety rail. The practitioner shows him how to balance with his arms held out beside him and stays close by as Bradley has a go. Within a few weeks Bradley shows good body control, spatial awareness and confidence. He is climbing to higher levels and is able to lift his leg over the top of the frame. He calls out to his friends "*look I climbed to the top.*" The practitioner praises Bradley's achievement and reminds him to think carefully about how he will climb down. Bradley attempts this but becomes a little anxious and needs some support to move backwards, placing one foot below the other onto the steps.

Links to Early Years Foundation Stage

Physical Development Movement and Space

- Manage body to create intended movements
- Move with control and coordination
- Travel around, under, over and through balancing and climbing equipment

How did the adult support Bradley's learning?

- By modelling safe use of the equipment
- By supporting Bradley and showing him how to balance with his arms out
- Through praise of his achievements and prompting him to think about what happens next.

Next steps

- Provide further opportunities for Bradley to think about different ways he could move around the apparatus
- Continue to support the climbing down stage until Bradley is confident to complete this on his own.

Context for learning:
Hopscotch with letters
Saba: 5 years



What did Saba do?

Saba's class have been exploring initial sounds. Her group enjoyed playing a lotto board game using picture cards to cover the initial sounds on their game card. Saba's teacher wishes to consolidate this activity in the outdoor area. She sets up a similar game but uses a traditional hopscotch grid as the game card. This game is instantly popular, as hopscotch has become a favourite game for Saba and her friends. As she observes, Saba's teacher notices that Saba has good underarm throwing skills and can roll the dice accurately in a straight line. However, she also notices that whilst Saba can complete the hop and jump phase seen in hopscotch, she cannot link the two together. She is concerned because Saba is unhappy when her friends point out that she is "*doing it wrong*". Saba wanders away from the game and her teacher asks if she would like to practice joining the hop and jump with her. Firstly they hop on the spot, and then they jump from feet together to feet apart. Finally they stand on one foot and jump to the feet apart position. Saba's teacher encourages her to start slowly and then speed up. They practice for the next few days and soon Saba comes rushing over, keen to show her teacher that she has mastered the new skill.

How did the adult support Saba's learning?

- By providing an experience based upon the children's interests
- By using observation of the whole experience to identify children's wider needs
- By breaking the difficult movement down into simple steps, support and model the action.

Links to Early Years Foundation Stage

Physical Development

Movement and Space

- Persevere in repeating some actions / attempts when developing a new skill
- Move with control and coordination

Using Equipment and Materials

- Use a range of small and large equipment

Next steps

- Observe additional aspects of Saba's physical development
- Plan consolidation activities, which include hopping, jumping and linking movements in adult focused sessions
- Praise and encourage Saba's attempts on a regular basis.

Context for learning:
Exploring rolling and jumping,
in the hall.
Miles: 6 years



What did Miles do?

In previous weeks, children have explored simple movements such as jumping and rolling. The focus of the session was to try rolling and jumping using small apparatus. The session started with a warm up game of 'beans' - jumping beans, runner beans, chilli beans and frozen beans. Miles participated enthusiastically, showed good body control and an ability to change body shape. The second part of the session involved practising jumps; recognising his confidence and ability, Miles was asked to explore star jumps and pencil jumps. He controlled his lower body to keep his legs straight and landed correctly. Next he practised rolls from side to side and then rolling along a mat but he struggled to hold his legs together. When the children moved onto the apparatus, Miles chose to transfer his skills to the bench. He jumped all the way along the bench with ease but found it much harder to complete the sideways roll. His teacher asked him to think about which apparatus he could use instead. He selected a low bench with a much wider top, where he could roll more easily. At the end of the session some children were asked to perform their work for the class. Miles explained the change he had made to complete the roll on apparatus.

How did the adult support Miles's learning?

- By giving Miles time to revisit skills whilst also providing more challenge
- By prompting Miles to consider an alternative solution
- By giving Miles the opportunity to explain and perform his activity to the class.

Links to Early Years Foundation Stage

Physical Development **Movement and Space**

- Move with confidence, imagination and in safety
- Move with control and coordination
- Demonstrate the control necessary to hold a fixed shape or position

Links to National Curriculum **For P.E.**

Unit 5: Gymnastics activities (1)

Next steps

- Extend the range of movements to include a greater variety of jumps
- Teach additional skills for an improved sideways roll by keeping legs straight and feet together
- Use a digital camera so Miles can see his body shape.